ofgem

Centre for Sustainable Energy

citizens advice scotland

citizens advice bureau

ENERGY BEST DEAL

2013/14 Review

Why **Energy Best Deal?**

Energy Best Deal is a consumer campaign developed by Ofgem and Citizens Advice that helps consumers on low incomes to:

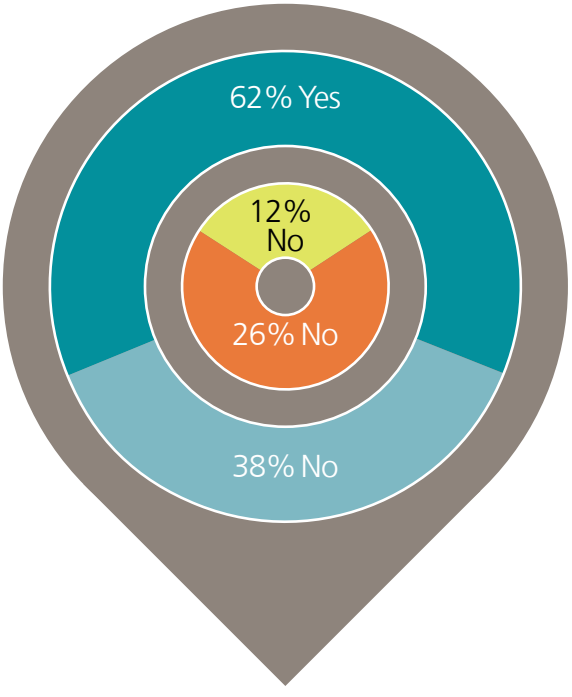
- reduce their energy costs by switching tariff, payment method or supplier
- know where to go for help if paying energy bills is a struggle
- save money by using less energy in their homes.

We know consumers need help with their energy bills because:

- Between January and December 2013, Citizens Advice Bureaux in England and Wales helped with almost 84,000 fuel debt issues.
- During the same period, more than half a million people looked at pages related to energy problems and how to save money on fuel bills on the Citizens Advice website **adviceguide.org.uk**. More than 20,000 of these looked at information on problems paying energy bills.
- Citizens Advice Bureaux in Scotland dealt with 4,139 new fuel debt issues between April 2013 and March 2014; an increase of 11 per cent on the previous year.
- The Energy Saving Trust estimates that the average home in the UK wasted £280 last year, simply by not being energy efficient.

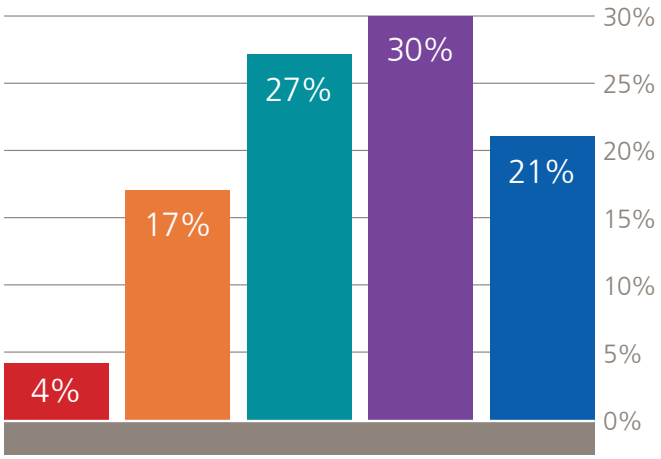
Can you heat your home to a comfortable level in winter?

- 62 per cent said – **Yes**.
- 38 per cent said – **No**.
- 26 per cent – **No**, I don't use the heating as much as I would like due to the cost.
- 12 per cent – **No**, I could not heat my home sufficiently due to the quality of the building fabric or the heating system.



Attitudes to winter fuel bills

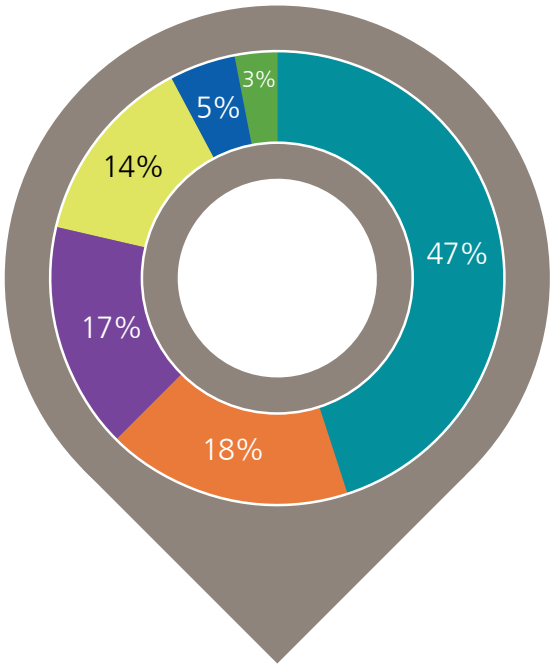
- Impossible to manage – I am already in debt with my fuel bills.
- A financial strain – sometimes I have to switch the heating off or not pay my energy bill so that I can afford other household bills.
- A worry, but I'm able to manage without skimping on other important household bills.
- Something I am concerned about but not a major worry.
- Not a problem.



Who benefits?

Energy Best Deal is aimed at consumers on low incomes who are most at risk of fuel poverty and the workers who support them. Agencies delivering Energy Best Deal sessions have well established links with other local support agencies and the frontline workers and volunteers that work with people in or at risk of fuel poverty. Sessions aimed at consumers are usually held with existing groups such as those for elderly people, tenants, parents or people with health problems.

Of those consumers who attended sessions over the winter of 2013/14:



- Retired.
- Unemployed.
- Working.
- Disabled or long term sick.
- Carers.
- Students.

Note: many people chose more than one option (for example a student and carer) and so the total comes to more than 100 per cent.

Sixty three per cent of consumers passed on something that they had learnt at the Energy Best Deal session to friends and family.

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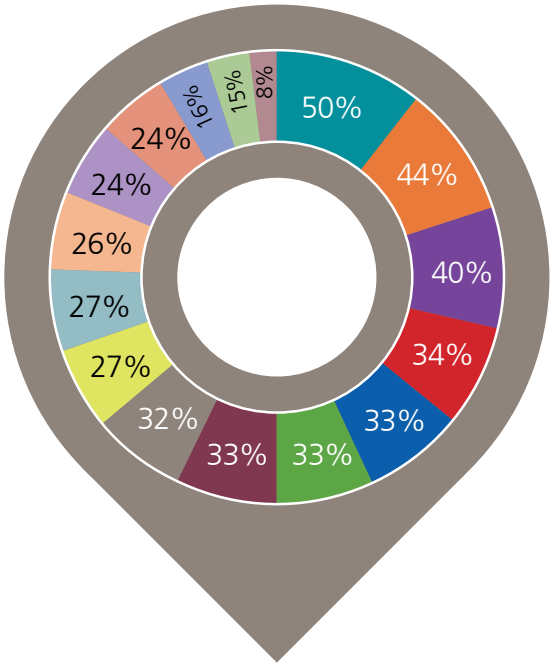
Frontline workers were asked if their organisation specialises in supporting specific groups or advising on specific topics.



- Housing.
- Debt and money management.
- Unemployment.
- Homelessness.
- Health or mental health.
- Young people.
- Older people.
- Disability or learning disability.
- Drug or alcohol misuse.
- Domestic abuse.
- Energy issues.
- Carers.
- Community organisations.
- Justice.
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME).
- Faith groups.

Note: many people chose more than one option and so the total comes to more than 100 per cent.

Ninety seven per cent of frontline workers said they felt better informed as a result of the Energy Best Deal session and eighty one per cent said the session had changed their opinion on the importance of fuel poverty for the people they work with.

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What is the **impact?**

Over the winter of 2013/14, a total of 1,484 Energy Best Deal sessions were delivered, directly training 10,349 consumers and 5,408 frontline workers. Based on evaluations of other financial capability programmes, which show that frontline workers use information to help an average of 15 clients in the year following training, Citizens Advice expects that between 2008 and spring 2015, at least **350,000 consumers will have benefited as a result of Energy Best Deal**.

To assess the impact of the 2013/14 Energy Best Deal campaign, Citizens Advice commissioned the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) to conduct an independent evaluation. This includes gathering information through a questionnaire distributed at sessions and carrying out follow-up telephone interviews with consumers and frontline workers to explore actions taken since the session.

Seventy five per cent of the consumers interviewed at an average of three months after the session had already taken action to save money on energy costs or other actions relating to seeking further advice, energy efficiency and applying for grants and other support.

Getting a better deal

Of one hundred and fifty consumers interviewed:

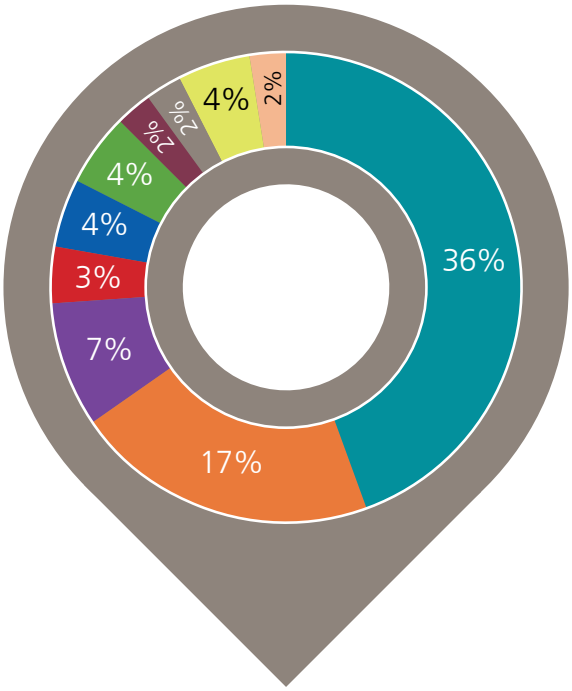
- more than a third had taken action to get a better deal on their energy bills since the session
- just over half of the people who looked for a better deal found one
- all but one of those who were offered a better deal switched to it.

Consumers who found a better deal and switched or intended to switch following their Energy Best Deal session were asked how much they expected to save. The largest amount saved was £430 per year while the smallest was £40 per year. On average the expected saving per person was just over £150 per year.

Cutting energy use

Of 150 consumers interviewed, 48 per cent had taken at least one kind of action to save energy in their home, as a result of the session.

The diagram below shows energy efficiency actions taken (number of actions taken; some consumers took more than one action).



- More aware of turning off appliances.
- Adjusted heating controls.
- Installed energy efficient light bulbs.
- Investigating insulation.
- Installed cavity wall or loft insulation, or double glazing.
- Reducing draughts.
- Installed new heating.
- Investigating renewable energy.
- Other (small measures).
- Water saving.

Who delivers the sessions?

In Scotland, Energy Best Deal is coordinated by Citizens Advice Scotland and sessions are delivered by Citizens Advice Bureaux.

In England and Wales, sessions are delivered via the financial capability forums. The forums cover all counties of England and Wales and are made up of agencies with an interest in helping people to manage their money. Just over half of the 182 agencies delivering were Citizens Advice Bureaux; others included independent advice agencies, social housing providers and volunteer agencies such as those supporting people in rural areas, older people and young families.

Getting the best deal – pass it on

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Ron, an 80 year old pensioner, and Sayed, also aged over 60, attended an Energy Best Deal session delivered by Barnet CAB. Following the session Ron switched from his current supplier to a better deal with another company. Sayed, who was already with the company Ron had switched to, was also offered a better deal.

Over the following months, they consulted with each other and discovered that their supplier was offering a cheaper tariff than the one they were on. Both only use electricity (no gas) and they were able to get a further £20 per year discount.

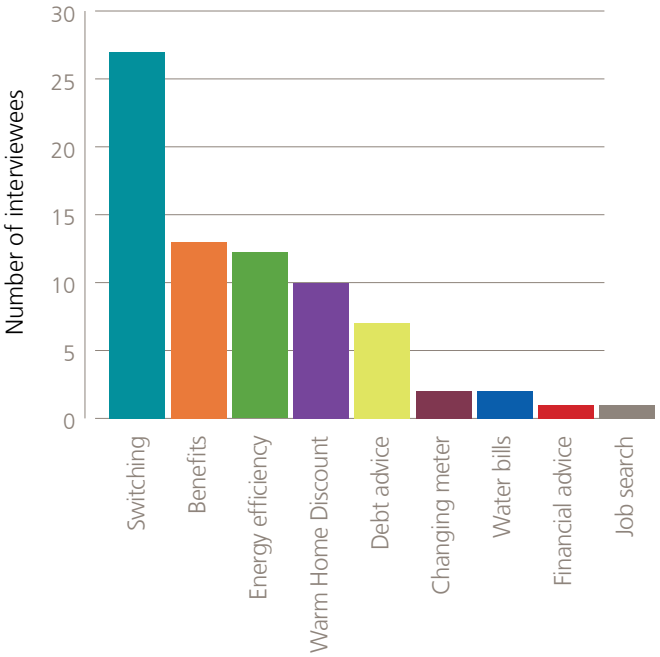
In total, Ron is saving £140 per year and Sayed is saving just under £100 per year. Both are much happier and have told their supplier that if they put the price up again they will look for a better deal!

Lawrence is a neighbour of Ron and Sayed. He also attended an Energy Best Deal session delivered by Barnet CAB. He wanted to make a saving like his neighbours so, following the session, he booked an advice appointment at the bureau as part of the Energy Best Deal Extra scheme. The adviser helped Lawrence to save £120 per year by changing tariff with his current supplier and he also received an extra £10 from them as compensation for not putting him on the correct tariff. Lawrence said he wouldn't have had the confidence if it were not for the Energy Best Deal presentation, his neighbours' testimonies and the bureau's advice and support.

Energy Best Deal **Extra**

As a result of additional funding over the last two years, Citizens Advice Bureaux delivering Energy Best Deal sessions have been able to offer additional one-to-one appointments to consumers attending the sessions.

Bureaux in England, Wales and Scotland carried out a total of 4,318 Energy Best Deal Extra (EBDx) advice appointments between October 2013 and April 2014.



As part of the independent evaluation, 52 telephone interviews were undertaken with people who had attended one of these appointments. Some of the benefits consumers described were:

- A recently bereaved client who saved around £150 a year on fuel bills.
- A client helped by the adviser to switch supplier, saving £230 a year. The adviser also referred the client to a third party organisation who did an energy survey of the client's home.
- A client was assisted by the adviser to switch energy supplier, reducing his monthly bill from £60 to £36 per month. He was in credit with his previous supplier and the credit has been refunded promptly.
- A client was assisted by the adviser to switch from jobseeker's allowance to employment and support allowance, and also helped to get her landlord to agree to switch from a prepayment meter to a credit meter for gas.

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Making a positive difference
for energy consumers

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Citizens Advice
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Further information

For more information about Energy Best Deal, including a range of resources and the full evaluation report, visit the Citizens Advice website **citizensadvice.org.uk/financialskillsforlife**
(click on Our projects>Energy Best Deal)

You can also contact Beth Bell at Citizens Advice:
beth.bell@citizensadvice.org.uk

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Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux – Citizens Advice Scotland (SCO16637)